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# Design Guidelines for Dorchester Avenue

*A Citizens' Handbook*



DRAFT





## **How to use this Book**

The City of Boston is committed to reviving its Grand Boulevards—the main streets of the City's neighborhoods. This book is a part of that effort; it focuses on the future of one of these streets—Dorchester Avenue.

It has been prepared with the help the people who live, work, and operate businesses along the Avenue. It establishes a framework to guide change on the Avenue to restore fully the Avenue's character as an attractive, lively, Main Street and a proud front door to its adjacent neighborhoods.

The goal of this book is to show the range of actions with which individuals can contribute to the revival of Dorchester Avenue—from adding a new sign, to fixing up a storefront, to major commercial and residential renovations and new developments.

## **How this Book is Organized**

**Section 1** describes the underlying goals and objectives for improvements to Dorchester Avenue and identifies the public agencies which can provide assistance in putting this new vision into action.

**Section 2** describes specific design guidelines which can be used to ensure new development plays its part in continuing efforts to help the Avenue regain its full potential.

**Section 3** describes regulations related to new development, including permits, approvals, and design review.



# Dorchester Avenue: A Citizen's Handbook

## **INTRODUCTION:**

### **Boston's Grand Boulevards**

Boston's Grand Boulevards .....	5
The Case for Reviving Boston's Boulevards Now .....	6
Boulevards Types Today .....	8
Forces for Change Today .....	10
IPOD's: Guiding The Process of Change .....	10

## **1**

### **Dorchester Avenue: A New Vision**

A Neighborhood Boulevard Today .....	12
Vision: A Direction for the Future .....	15
Implementation: Making the Vision a Reality .....	16
Roles of Other Public Agencies .....	16

## **2**

### **Dorchester Avenue Design Guidelines**

Site Planning .....	24
Parking Lots, Outdoor Work and Storage Areas .....	30
Landscaping and Screening .....	38
Commercial Buildings and Facades .....	44
Storefronts .....	54
Signs .....	60
Residential Buildings .....	70
Larger Projects .....	72

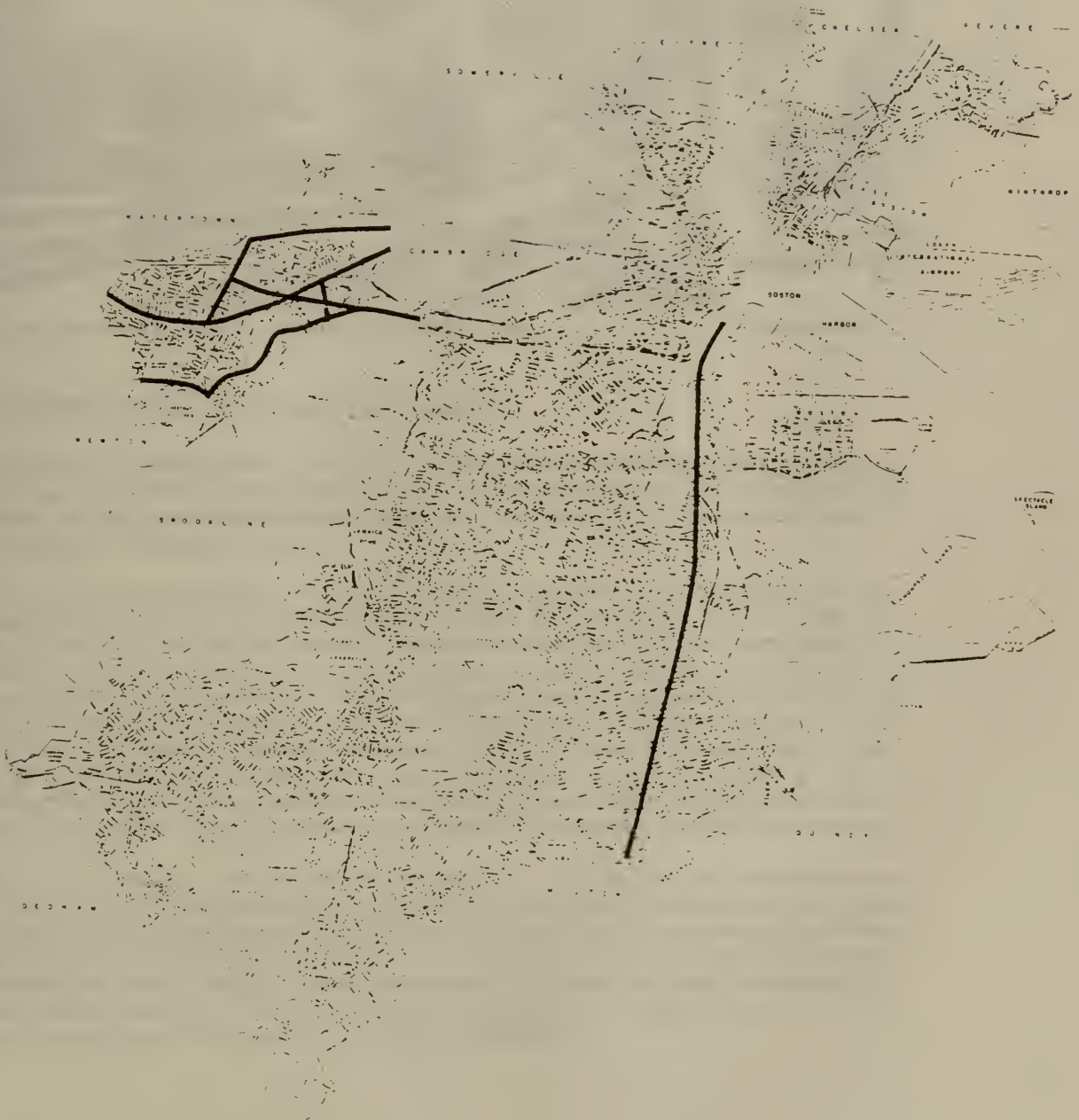
## **3**

### **Applying the Guidelines: The Process**

The Process: Design Review and New Zoning .....	74
The Sub-neighborhoods: Different Problems and Opportunities .....	76
Where to Go Next .....	81







*City of Boston's boulevards.*





*Boston's boulevards are the Main Streets of the City's neighborhoods*

*(Commonwealth Avenue)*

## **INTRODUCTION: Boston's Grand Boulevards**

Boston's boulevards are the main streets of the City's neighborhoods. Together these streets form a network which connects the different neighborhoods to one another and to downtown. As "front doors" to the City's residential neighborhoods the boulevards are important in establishing their character and image, as well as providing them with needed services.

Each of the city's boulevards has its own character, reflecting the character and the aspirations of the neighborhoods through which it runs. Each has a different mix of uses, and architectural character. Some, like Dorchester Avenue and Centre Street in Jamaica Plain, serve a wide variety of the civic, recreational, commercial, and spiritual needs of their adjoining neighborhoods. These boulevards mix civic and institutional buildings, fine landmark churches, intimately scaled neighborhood business districts and an attractive, varied residential building stock. By contrast, boulevards like Commonwealth Avenue in Brighton and the Jamaica Way are often more uniformly residential in character, with grand landscaped central malls. These boulevards act as important visual amenities and neighborhood parks for the adjacent neighborhoods. Streets such as Washington Street in Jamaica Plain and Roxbury, now released from the shadow of the elevated Orange Line, connect a series of neighborhood business districts—many in need of revitalization.

The dramatic revival of Boston's economy has been reflected in the physical fabric of its residential neighborhoods. However, this revival has yet to make a significant impact on the boulevards which serve these neighborhoods. Often these main streets remain burdened by years of neglect. Some have lost the intimacy that characterized them as neighborhood commercial and social centers. The grand landscaped character which established the beauty of others has fallen into disrepair. Still others have been overwhelmed by auto traffic and bleak parking lots. The challenge that Boston faces now is to reclaim these main streets; only then will they truly represent the spirit of resurgent neighborhoods.





## Boston's Grand Boulevards



(Commonwealth Avenue)

### History and Today: the Case for Reviving Boston's Boulevards Now

The differences among Boston's boulevards have their origins in different eras. Some, like Washington Street, can be traced back to the City's earliest history, as roads which linked Boston with other towns and villages in the region. Others, like Dorchester Avenue, were constructed at the beginning of the nineteenth century as connections between early industries and the city and its port.

However, it was not until the latter part of the 19th century that many of these important roads began to take on their current form. When the city's economy and population surged, they became the location for the streetcar lines which reached out to open up large new areas for development. The torrent of residential development which followed along the streetcar lines engulfed smaller established village communities. But the new residential areas remained economically tied to the city—the sole source of jobs—and so it was that the streetcar lines, which represented the connection to the city, became the focal points of the new communities. Much of present-day Dorchester, Allston/Brighton, Roxbury and West Roxbury, and similar neighborhoods date from this period. Other streets, such as Western Avenue, developed at this same time as important arteries for the City's port and manufacturing economies.

While the streetcar tended to follow the alignment of pre-existing roads, the landscaped boulevards which grew out of Boston's parks movement were not so constrained. Such streets as the Jamaica Way and Commonwealth Avenue in Brighton were in-

spired by the "City Beautiful" vision of the city. The leaders of this movement saw grand boulevards not as links to the city and its jobs, but as escapes from the city, offering pleasure travel amid greenery, water, and quiet.

At the beginning of this century many of the city's boulevards had taken on the appearance which is familiar to us now. But while Boston's boulevards today still convey evidence of their proud origins, in many cases their strong underlying design qualities have been obscured and distorted by decades of neglect. Excessive and inappropriate signage, vacant lots and buildings, and an invasion of incompatible new buildings have hidden the finely scaled, highly attractive character of many older neighborhoods.

OLMSTEAD predicted



In many places the pedestrian-scale environment of neighborhood retail stores and houses has been overtaken by the car, the parking lot and the drive-in fast food chain. Much new development follows the auto-dominated model of suburban strip architecture. This shift has radically changed building patterns; in place of shops and offices located at the sidewalk edge serving the pedestrian, newer buildings are often located behind parking lots remote from the street edge. Development on larger lots even takes the form of large shopping centers.

older commercial and neighborhood centers, maintaining their essential physical characters while responding to newer requirements.

Yet despite the difficulties of the past decades, Boston's boulevards have maintained their potential, and today can serve again as proud symbols of resurgent neighborhoods. Planning for future development must be responsive to the context of

*Dorchester Avenue at Andrew Square in 1910 . The street car changed the face of the City.*







## **Boulevard Types Today**

Different types of boulevards present both unique and common challenges. While shaping a vision for the future of each boulevard must reflect the special circumstances of its own neighborhood context, Boston's boulevards can be divided into four broad categories suggesting different planning strategies and priorities:

- **Parkway Boulevards:** Major landscaped streets, such as the Jamascaway and Commonwealth Avenue, which constitute important neighborhood, and often city-wide, open space amenities. A number of the parkways constitute important links in Frederick Law Olmsted's "Emerald Necklace" of parks and boulevards, laid out for Boston in the late 19th century. Planning for the future of these boulevards must focus preservation and restoration of the landscaped character of the parkways which will continue to enrich Boston's re-emerging open space system.
- **Restoration Boulevards:** Major residential and commercial streets, such as Dorchester and Harvard Avenues and Centre Street. While economic vitality is a critical concern, the primary focus for these boulevards is on restoring and enhancing their generally positive physical character. Zoning and public improvements should aim to build on and enhance existing character and resources.
- **Redevelopment Boulevards:** Major public streets such as Western Avenue with often negative character and inappropriate land use patterns, but containing underutilized land with major opportunities for new development. Zoning and public improvements should establish new, more appropriate, land use patterns and design character for these boulevards which enables them to play a more major and positive role in their neighborhoods. These boulevards can be a source of new jobs and other economic benefits.
- **Revitalization Boulevards:** Major residential and commercial streets, such as Blue Hill Avenue and parts of Washington Street, that are located in neighborhoods for whom economic revitalization is the primary objective. These boulevards are critical to the creation of jobs, housing, and access to neighborhood shopping and services. Enhancing the physical character of these boulevards, while a critical concern, must occur in the context of a larger revitalization effort.

**\*\*Note:** in a number of cases a single boulevard can, along its length, fall into several of these categories.



## ***Boston's Grand Boulevards***



*Parkway boulevards are important arteries of the City's open space system.*

*(Commonwealth Avenue)*



*Restoration boulevards focus on restoring and enhancing physical character - buildings, sidewalks, etc.*

*(Dorchester Avenue)*



*Redevelopment boulevards offer potential for significant change related to a larger neighborhood context.*

*(Western Avenue)*



*Revitalization boulevards where design improvements are part of a larger economic revitalization plan.*

*(Washington Street at Egleston Square)*





## Forces for Change Today

Three important factors have now set the stage for the revival of the boulevards:

- After more than a decade of economic recovery, Boston's boom has begun to bring new investment back to the city's boulevards—evidenced most dramatically by the increase in building permits for new development.
- The City, while still struggling with the economic problems which have built up over decades of worsening fiscal conditions, has made new resources available to maintain its streets and public spaces.
- Most importantly, the City has renewed its commitment to neighborhood revitalization, and its citizens have responded by working together to shape future growth and change in their communities.

## New Zoning and the Boulevards: IPODs: Guiding the Process of Change

--BRA TO PREPARE TEXT

- planning and economic development objectives
- new zoning
- role of PZAC's, etc.



## **Dorchester Avenue: A New Vision**





## Dorchester Avenue: A Neighborhood Boulevard Today

### Planning Process

The Dorchester Avenue Revitalization Team (DART) first assembled in 1985 in response to a call from local elected officials and community residents who cited sharp increases in development projects on the Avenue which were incompatible with residential and neighborhood-dependent business uses. DART's goal was to stimulate activities along Dorchester Avenue which would improve its vitality and enhance its character.

In December 1986, DART, whose membership included individual residents and local businessmen and civic and neighborhood associations from all corners of Dorchester, met collectively with a variety of City agencies to discuss short-term and long-term solutions to the recognized myriad of ills along Dorchester Avenue.

Throughout the following months it became clear to DART members and state and city officials that many of Dorchester Avenue's problems were the result of development allowed by the Boston Zoning Code. It was quickly realized that the long-term solution to community concerns was to rezone Dorchester Avenue. In June 1987, Boston Redevelopment Authority staff met with DART members and introduced the concept of Interim Planning Overlay Districts (IPOD), through which temporary restrictions are put in place to control development while new zoning is developed.

In July 1987, the BRA initiated the *Dorchester Avenue Urban Design Study* which involved a de

tailed analysis of the problems and opportunities facing each section of the Avenue.

At this time, the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services, in cooperation with DART and the BRA, organized a series of major community meetings to review the study's preliminary findings and provide broad community input. Mayor Flynn opened the first public meeting with an announcement of the IPOD for Dorchester Avenue. Subsequent public meetings focused in detail on different sections of the Avenue.

In May 1988, the *Dorchester Avenue Urban Design Study* was issued; the study identified problems, outlined a strategy for future improvements and recommended the preparation of new guidelines to help shape future development along the Avenue.

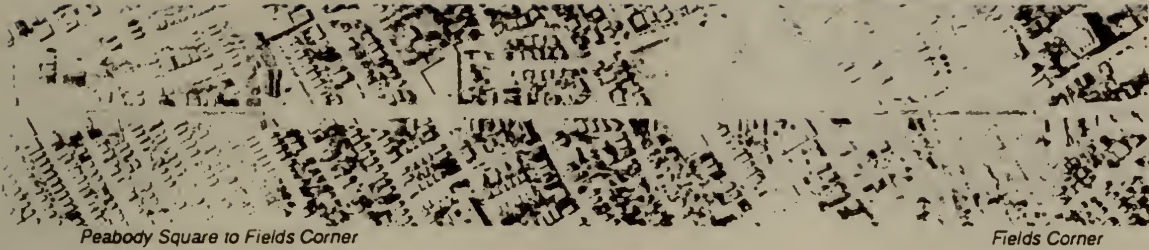
In 1988, Mayor Flynn announced the membership of a new Dorchester Avenue Planning and Zoning Advisory Committee (PZAC) to work with the city in developing new zoning for the Avenue. Since that time the PZAC has worked with the BRA to develop new zoning and to monitor and review development proposals.

This *Citizen's Handbook* introduces new guidelines for development on Dorchester Avenue which reflects the ongoing planning work undertaken by the PZAC and the BRA as well as the analysis and recommendations of the Dorchester Avenue Urban Design Study.





## Dorchester Avenue



Peabody Square to Fields Corner

Fields Corner



### Description of the Avenue

Dorchester Avenue is the Main Street of Boston's largest neighborhood and an important focus of life for the entire Dorchester community. The Avenue serves as a "front door" to the residential neighborhoods on either side; its character reflects directly on the character and image of these neighborhoods where one in every ten city residents live.

In the four miles between Lower Mills and Andrew Square the Avenue is a mixed commercial and residential street serving many of the commercial, recreational, and spiritual needs of the Dorchester community. The Avenue's character varies considerably along its length. Some areas are predominantly residential with triple deckers and one and two family homes; others include small and larger neighborhood commercial centers. Landmark churches and buildings give a special character to some parts, and important public open spaces shape the character of others.

Between Lower Mills and Andrew Square the Avenue is made up of a chain of eight smaller main streets—each serving as a "front doors" to adjoining sub-neighborhoods:

- **Lower Mills:** a neighborhood commercial center with several renovated historic mill buildings.
- **Gallivan Boulevard:** a mainly residential neighborhood with several institutions including Carney Hospital and Dorchester Park.

- **Peabody Square:** a medium sized commercial center served by the Ashmont MBTA station.
- **Peabody Square to Fields Corner:** a mixed residential and commercial area characterized by triple deckers and small neighborhood businesses and retail uses.
- **Fields Corner:** a major neighborhood commercial center which also contains the town field, several renovated landmark commercial structures and the Field's Corner MBTA station.
- **Glover's Corner:** a mixed-use area including manufacturing, commercial and auto related uses.
- **Columbia Road:** a mixed residential and commercial area characterized by triple deckers and small neighborhood serving retail stores.
- **Andrew Square:** a mixed-use, mainly commercial and residential area on the edge of residential South Boston.

Though each of these smaller main street areas has its own flavor and mix of uses, Dorchester Avenue as a whole retains a cohesive identity reflecting origins in a shared history.

public  
theatre

public  
theatre



## Dorchester Avenue.



Glovers Corner



### History

In 1805 the Avenue began as a toll road—the Dorchester Turnpike—which ran from Boston to the mills at Lower Mills on the Neponset River. The Turnpike did not prove to be a great financial success, and the Turnpike Corporation quickly went out of business, as merchants continued to prefer using earlier steep and winding roads rather than pay a toll. By 1831, however, the Avenue connected a series of village centers—including Fields Corner—which are largely visible today. But it was only after 1870, when the streetcar opened up new land areas on the perimeter of the city for development that Avenue began to take on its present appearance. The Avenue became a streetcar line and new residential development quickly sprang up along its edges as the city enjoyed its period of most rapid expansion. By the end of the nineteenth century Dorchester Avenue had become an important thoroughfare whose development reflected the prosperity of the city itself.

In this century, Dorchester Avenue saw its economic fortunes decline sharply, along with the rest of the City's older neighborhoods, as Boston's port and manufacturing base failed to regain their pre-Depression pre-eminence. From the end of World War II to the end of the 1970's the Avenue endured a steady period of economic retrenchment. Increased automobile ownership encouraged widespread migration to more distant suburbs and led to new auto-oriented, suburban-strip patterns of development along some parts of the Avenue. This period of decline was also reflected in the deteriorating

condition of much of the Avenue's handsome turn-of-the-century architecture.

Today, while economic recovery has created a boom in housing prices and record low unemployment in Dorchester, the impacts of this recovery are, as yet, only partially visible on the Avenue.

### Problems

In varying ways both the car and the economy have taken their toll on the Avenue. At Glover's Corner major concentrations of auto-related uses, such as car repair and gas stations, have replaced housing and neighborhood-oriented businesses. This concentration of auto-uses has severely damaged the friendly pedestrian scale character of the Avenue's streetscape; today it constitutes the weak link in the chain of main streets which form the Avenue and detracts both from the character of surrounding residential neighborhoods and the Avenue as a whole.

In other parts of the Avenue development patterns oriented toward the automobile user have resulted in buildings being located away from the street edge and an Avenue lined with parking lots and other paved areas. The resulting streetscape—oriented towards the car rather than the pedestrian—becomes an anonymous and unfriendly place for pedestrian and driver alike, detracting from the character of the Avenue and the surrounding neighborhoods.







Columbia Road

Andrew Square



Over several decades many older commercial buildings have been overwhelmed by a clutter of new signs and unappealing facade additions which obscure the true character of the Avenue's fine turn-of-the century building stock. Very often the generous storefront windows which typified older commercial buildings have been replaced by very small windows which close businesses off from the street. This change, though often motivated by security concerns, has resulted in an inhospitable character for much of the street frontage detracting from the character of the street and the neighborhood as a whole.

## **Vision: A Direction for the Future**

However, despite these problems there are many signs for optimism today. The elegant architecture of the streetcar suburb with its pedestrian ambience remains visible though in need of repair. Significant building activity—some of it with public sector support—has once again returned to the Avenue offering the opportunity to repair earlier mistakes; major capital improvements and maintenance programs have fully reclaimed the Avenue's large and smaller open spaces; and an ambitious street tree program, completed in 1987, has revived its "greenness."

A new vision for the Avenue must build on its existing resources:

- the close ties between the retail uses and services

offered by each section of the Avenue and adjacent residential neighborhoods:

- the series of landmark churches and buildings which serve as neighborhood centers, and add a singular visual character to each sub-neighborhood;
- the parks and other open spaces (such as the newly tree-lined streetscape between Lower Mills and Columbia Road) which serve as places of recreation and relaxation;
- the handsome, predominantly wooden, turn-of-the-century commercial and residential buildings, which show a consistent height (very few rise over four stories) and are often vividly-colored.

A vision for a new era of planning for this important main street must look to the Avenue's future while it also draws inspiration from its past. It must build on these resources and peel away the layers of poor planning and design, to fully restore the Avenue—not in the sense of returning it to its appearance in 1870 or 1920, but in the sense of realizing its full potential as a pedestrian-scaled neighborhood meeting place and a symbol of community pride.

The design guidelines contained in Section 2 set out in detail how individual projects can contribute to this goal.



## **Implementation: Making the Vision a Reality New Zoning, Public Improvements, and Planning Initiatives**

The restoration of Dorchester Avenue will require a continuing partnership between residents, merchants, the City, and other public agencies. This partnership will have two key components:

- **Public improvements** to streets, sidewalks, parks, and other public facilities. Significant improvements, including an extensive street tree and open space improvements have already set the stage for the Avenue's renewal. Continuing improvements as well as effective maintenance programs will be important.
- **New zoning and design guidelines** set a comprehensive framework for future private sector improvements.

New zoning incorporates the following provisions:

- **new land use controls** which encourage appropriate uses and restrict the development and expansion of inappropriate land uses which are in conflict with the Avenue's neighborhood-oriented character;
- **height and density controls** which ensure that new development is compatible in scale with the Avenue's existing building stock;
- **design guidelines** for commercial and residential projects which govern site planning, landscaping, parking lots, building facades, storefronts, and signs, to encourage renovations and new development which are compatible with the Avenue's character;
- **design review procedures** for major projects which ensures a neighborhood voice in major new developments.

The rest of this Section outlines the roles the City and its public agencies will play to support these changes and how the services of these agencies can be used to help restore the Avenue.

Section 2 contains the new design guidelines.

### **Roles of Other Public Agencies**

In addition to initiatives included in new zoning, the City will support and encourage future improvements on Dorchester Avenue in a variety of other ways:

- continued improvements to streets and sidewalks;
- business loan programs, including support for storefront and signage improvements;
- continued improvements to open spaces;
- business assistance programs for Glovers Corner ;
- rigorous enforcement of signage and other regulations;
- continued improvements to the Avenue's transit stations.

The following pages outline the roles of the public agencies and the services they provide. To contact these agencies directly refer to telephone numbers on page 81.





**CITY OF BOSTON: BOSTON  
TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT  
(BTD)**

The Boston Transportation is responsible for planning improvements to the City's transportation system, including all aspect of parking and transportation planning.

See page 81 for additional information.

**CITY OF BOSTON: INSPECTIONAL  
SERVICES DEPARTMENT (ISD)**

Most new construction or alterations to existing buildings, even jobs as small as a new sign, require a building permit, or a change in use/occupancy permit. The Department of Inspectional Services reviews all applications for these permits and denies applications that do not conform with the state building code or the city's zoning code. In a city as large as Boston it is very difficult to monitor all development in the neighborhoods. Sometimes illegal development occurs without the proper permits. The public can assist Inspectional Services by pointing out examples of suspicious activity which can then be fully investigated.

See page 81 for additional information.

**COMMONWEALTH OF  
MASSACHUSETTS:  
MASSACHUSETTS BAY  
TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY  
(MBTA)**

Three MBTA Red Line stations are located directly on the Avenue — at Ashmont/Peabody Square, Fields Corner, and Andrew Square. The Savin Hill and the U Mass/JFK stations also serve the Avenue. The MBTA is presently in final design to comprehensively modernize Andrew Station. This station, built as part of the Dorchester Tunnel subway train line which was completed in 1919, is to be completely renovated to bring it up to the standard of the new and modern stations on the Red and Orange Lines. The modernization will provide access for physically handicapped patrons, improve the circulation of the station for vehicle operations and pedestrians and upgrade the overall physical quality of the station. The new station is expected to commence full service in 1992.

See page 81 for additional information.

*Architect's rendering of the new Andrew Station as seen from Dorchester Avenue. (Andrew Square)*







## **Dorchester Avenue: Design Guidelines**



## Guidelines for Dorchester Avenue

*The guidelines contained in this section include design recommendations for:*

- *site planning*
- *parking lots*
- *landscaping and screening*
- *buildings*
- *storefront*
- *signs*
- *residential buildings*
- *larger development projects.*

*The guidelines encourage new development and improvements to existing buildings which respect and enhance the character of Dorchester Avenue. The guidelines can help ensure that all of the Avenue's commercial and residential buildings work together to build a more cohesive image and capture the Avenue's potential. In certain places the requirements of the guidelines are more stringent than those contained in zoning but reflect the goals of the IPOD and neighborhood concerns.*





## **A SUMMARY OF THE DORCHESTER AVENUE DESIGN GUIDELINES**

### **Commercial Buildings**

**1.0 SITE PLANNING...**should locate buildings directly on the Avenue, with parking located behind or to the side. Page 24.

**2.0 PARKING LOTS, OUTDOOR WORK and STORAGE AREAS...**should be screened with landscaping and fencing from the Avenue and abutting residential uses . Page 30.

**3.0 LANDSCAPING and SCREENING ...** should be used to make the Avenue's commercial districts more attractive, and to provide visual screening between commercial and residential uses. Page 38.

**4.0 COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS and FACADES...**new and renovated buildings should be compatible with the height and architectural character of the Avenue's existing commercial buildings and should encourage active street life. Page 44.

**5.0 STOREFRONTS...**should be open and welcoming to the shopper and stroller. Materials and details in keeping with the Avenue's finest commercial architecture. Page 54.

**6.0 SIGNS...**should enhance the character of individual buildings and the Avenue. Signs should present a clear and direct message, and should be carefully located to avoid obscuring important architectural features. Page 60.

### **Residential Buildings**

**7.0 RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS. .**new and renovated buildings should reflect the well-defined patterns of height, siting, and architectural character in the Avenue's residential areas . Page 70.

### **8.0 LARGER DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS**

**8.0 LARGE PROJECTS...**require special consideration to ensure that they respect neighborhood concerns and the character of the Avenue. Page 72.



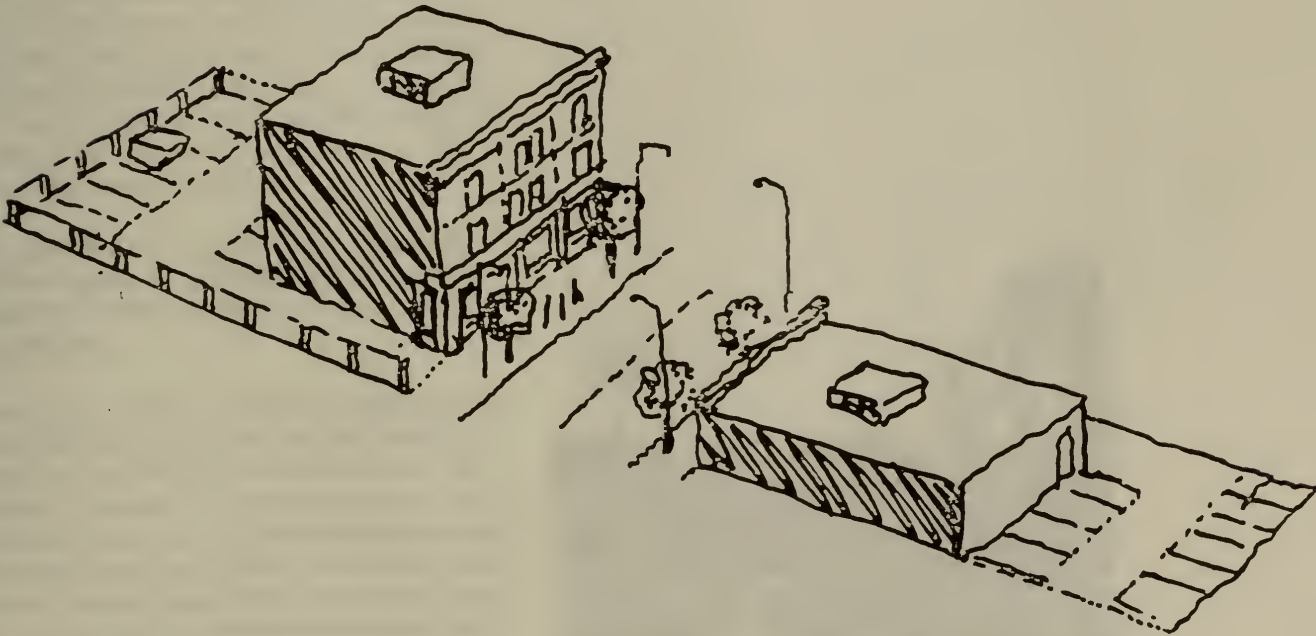
## 1. Site Planning

### 1.0 SITE PLANNING... should locate buildings directly on the Avenue, with parking behind or to the side.

*Site planning patterns—the way in which a building, its parking, and its landscaped open space are located on a lot—have a major effect on a neighborhood's character. In the older commercial areas along Dorchester Avenue, buildings come right up to the sidewalk's edge. This pattern gives the Avenue a well defined sense of enclosure, making it a lively and comfortably scaled place to walk and shop. At its best the Avenue is enlivened by interesting window displays, finely scaled and colorful storefronts, signs, awnings, and shade trees.*

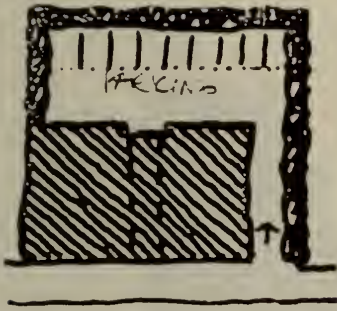
*Newer development along the Avenue does not always respect this pattern. In place of storefronts and porches, long stretches of the Avenue are now fronted by parking lots. These lots, particularly if they lack landscaping and screening, have a bleak and unfriendly quality, which detracts from the Avenue's pattern of storefronts and houses.*

**Locate buildings at the edge of the sidewalk with parking located behind.**

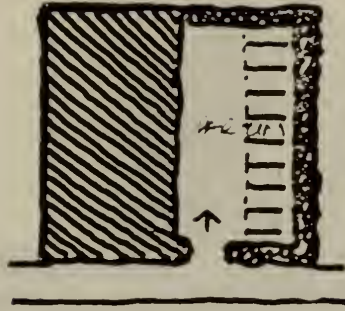




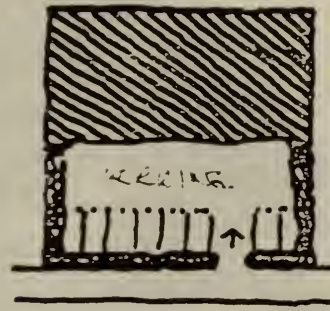
## 1. Site Planning



Locate new building on the Avenue with parking behind.



Parking on the side of building maximizes street front devoted to building.



All parking located at Street edge must have landscaping and screening.

### Planning the Site

#### 1.1. Locate new commercial buildings at the sidewalk edge facing the Avenue.

This applies to all commercial uses, including offices and industrial and auto-related uses. Under exceptional circumstances front yard setbacks may be appropriate—for instance, where an existing front yard setback pattern predominates and contributes significantly to the character of an area, buildings may match the existing pattern. (Note: uses such as gas stations will have special requirements.)

#### 1.2. Locate parking (and any allowable outdoor work or storage areas) behind buildings, away from the Avenue and sidestreets.

If the lot size, shape, or other compelling conditions make this impossible, parking should be located to the side rather than the front of the building, to minimize street frontage occupied by parking areas and to allow buildings to connect directly to the sidewalk. In all cases avoid locating parking areas on street corners, where they occupy maximum street frontage and have the greatest visual impact. (All parking located at the Avenue edge must be screened, as described in Section 2.4. on page 27.)



Parking lots in front of buildings disrupt the character of the street especially when located at corner.

(Andrews Square)





## **1. Site Planning**



*Perimeter screening must be used to protect surrounding residential environments. (Allston/Brighton)*

### **1.3. Front yards are not encouraged for non-residential uses.**

If included, they should provide a landscaped transition area between the building and the street. Parking, and any allowable outdoor work or storage areas, may not be located in the yard area located directly in front of the building.

#### ***Curb Cuts***

### **1.4. Limit curb cuts.**

Only one curb cut is permitted for businesses with less than 100 ft. of frontage, and a maximum of two for businesses with longer frontages. The maximum allowable width for curb cuts is 30 ft.

#### ***Perimeter Screening***

### **1.5. Provide perimeter screening around all commercial or industrial lots which abut residential uses.**

(Refer to sections 2.5, 2.7, and 2.9 for details.)



### **Location of Uses on the Lot**

Active and publicly accessible street-level uses, including stores, offices, and showrooms, are the primary source of interest for passerby along the Avenue. Interruptions in this pattern weaken the Avenue's attractiveness as a place to shop and stroll.

**1.6. Locate stores, office spaces, showrooms and other publicly accessible spaces directly at the Avenue's sidewalk edge.**

(i) **Street level stores and restaurants:** maximize frontage along the Avenue devoted to these uses.

(ii) **Office space:** locate reception areas, and other spaces that are publicly accessible or require large windows, along the Avenue frontage.

(iii) **Industrial and automobile-related businesses:** locate show rooms, eating areas, office space, and similar active uses along the Avenue; screen loading docks, service bays, and similar service uses from the Avenue.



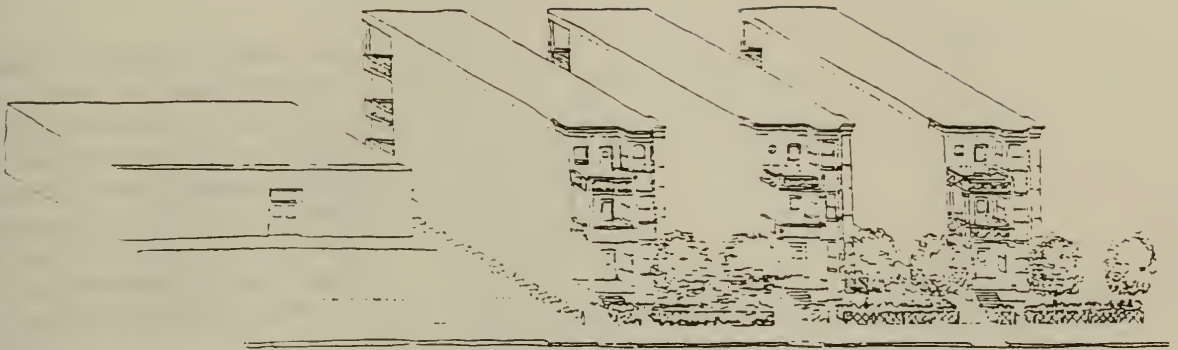
*With careful consideration auto-related and industrial uses can be attractive and contribute to the character of the Avenue.*  
(Dorchester Avenue)



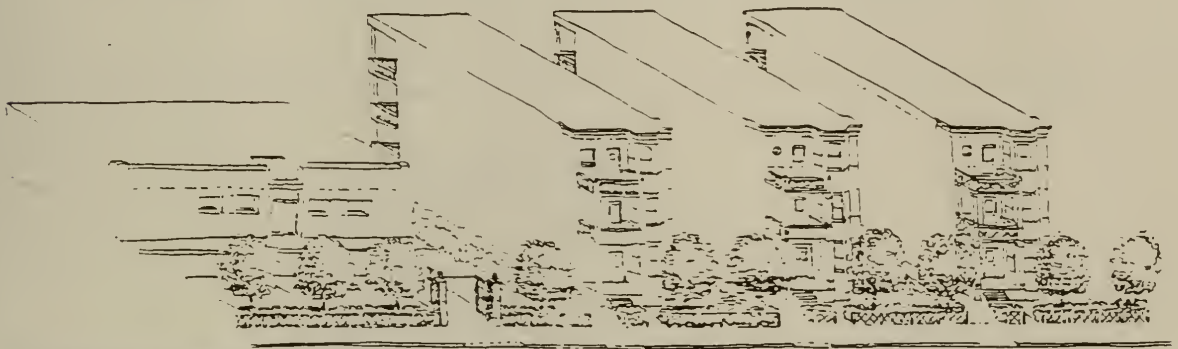


## 1. Site Planning

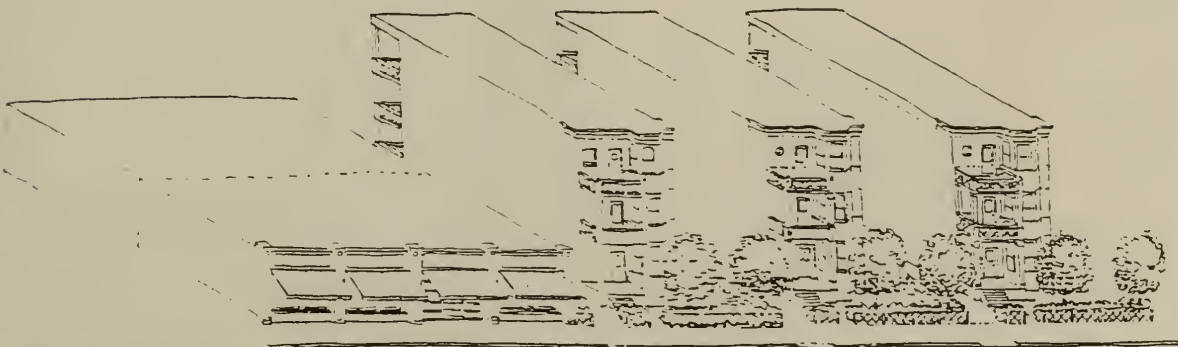
*Additions and renovations can provide opportunities to .....*



*Improve parking lots located along the street. These disrupt the character of the street and detract from surrounding residential uses.*



*Landscaping, screening, gates, and other improvements to these lots can serve to re-integrate buildings to the streetscape and to the adjacent uses.*



*Major additions can present an opportunity to fully reintegrate buildings into the streetscape and to the adjacent uses.*



***Major Renovations and Additions***

**1.7. Locate major renovations or additions so they strengthen connections between the building and the Avenue.**

When renovating or expanding existing buildings which are currently separated from the Avenue by parking areas or other barriers, try to connect the building more fully to the Avenue frontage. Locate new expansion space between the existing building and the Avenue, or use other approaches to improve the Avenue frontage including landscape screening and fencing, gates, awnings, display windows, canopies, etc.



#### 4. Buildings and Facades

**4.0 COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS and FACADES.** . . new and renovated buildings should be compatible with the height and architectural character of the Avenue's older commercial buildings, and should encourage active street life.

*Dorchester Avenue grew from an undeveloped road to the Main Street of a new neighborhood in a very short period of time, between 1870 and 1920. This rapid development ensured a consistency of character in its residential and commercial architecture. Consistent patterns of height, massing, composition, materials, and colors established an underlying visual cohesiveness for the Avenue's commercial districts and contribute to their attractiveness and success as pedestrian shopping areas today.*

*Today the condition of the Avenue's older commercial architecture varies considerably. Some buildings are in excellent condition; other fine buildings have been overwhelmed by successive layers of poor quality alterations. Renovations of these buildings should aim to peel away these layers and help restore the underlying quality of the Avenue's architecture.*

*New construction need not—and should not—imitate the past. It should, however, respect the essential characteristics of the Avenue's finest commercial buildings. In this way new construction can help preserve and enhance the attractiveness of these commercial areas.*

**The restored Liggett building represents one of the finest examples of the Avenue's commercial architecture.**

*(Fields Corner)*







### Building Height

*Most buildings on Dorchester Avenue range between one and three stories in height—only a few exceed three stories. Maintaining a consistent building height within the commercial areas can help to promote visual harmony between new and older buildings. (There are rare occasions when visually breaking the existing pattern may be appropriate—for example, the six-story Baker Chocolate factory at Lower Mill ends the Avenue with an exclamation mark—but while opportunities for taller buildings may exist they are the exception, not the rule.)*

*The height of new buildings should respect local patterns along the Avenue. New buildings can be either too high or too low: taller buildings can overwhelm their lower neighbors, while lower buildings between taller buildings can be equally disruptive of the streetscape by failing to provide the degree of enclosure on which the intimacy of older commercial areas often depends.*

**4.1. Buildings should not exceed three stories, except under special circumstances.**

Taller buildings may be acceptable under special circumstances, including the prevailing local building height, or sites of special significance.



*Photo of chocolate factory—taller buildings may be appropriate in sites of special significance.*

*(Lower Mills)*



*Three storey commercial building. (Peabody Square)*



#### **4. Buildings and Facades**

Two page spread on typical building types on the Avenue











### *Composition: the parts of the building facade*

*The facades of the Avenue's older commercial buildings share many common characteristics which help establish a cohesive identity for the commercial areas. Facades tend to be subdivided into smaller areas, both in their height and their width.*

#### *(i) Dividing the Building's Height into Street-level, Upper Levels, and Top*

*Typically, the different floor levels of commercial buildings have distinctly different characters reflecting different uses:*

- **STREET LEVEL:** *First floors play an important role in establishing the character of the Avenue, particularly in commercial areas. First floors are generally used for shops, offices, showrooms, and other publicly-accessible spaces; they should present an open and welcoming face to the passer-by. Floor to ceiling heights are generally taller than on upper floors, and windows are larger. In the case of retail uses one finds large shop windows for display, awnings, and signs. First floor levels in commercial buildings often differ in color and/or materials from upper levels. Sometimes a different articulation of the same material is used to distinguish between levels.*
- **UPPER FLOORS:** *The character of these floors reflect their uses—generally residential or office areas—which are often not accessible to the public. Second and third floors are typically similar to each other in character. Windows are usually vertically proportioned, of similar size, and are regularly spaced in the wall surface. Sometimes windows are grouped in pairs or threes or form bay windows.*
- **TOP:** *Cornices along Dorchester Avenue usually provide a decorative and functional "top" for the building as it meets the sky. Some are simple, others more elaborate—the grandeur or simplicity of a cornice often reflects the aspirations of the whole building.*





*The frame at work . . .breaking down the scale of a larger building.*

**(ii) Dividing Building Width into Smaller Bays**

*Building facades are often divided into smaller bays by a clearly expressed frame of vertical elements, which usually—but not always—reflects the location of structural columns or walls. The clear expression of these bays is particularly important in larger buildings. The bays divide the facade into smaller pieces, helping to integrate it into the visual texture of the Avenue's many smaller buildings. In the case of buildings with multiple storefronts, bays also create a separation between stores, allowing each store to establish its own identity. Typical bay widths on Dorchester Avenue vary between 12 and 24 feet—15 feet is a typical bay width.*

**4.2. New buildings should be compatible in composition with the Avenue's older commercial architecture.**

(i) In multi-story buildings, use changes in color, materials, and/or facade articulation to establish clear distinctions between the character of the first floor, upper floors, and top of the building.

Taller first floor heights are encouraged. First floor heights should be carefully considered in relation to established patterns within the commercial area and adjacent buildings.

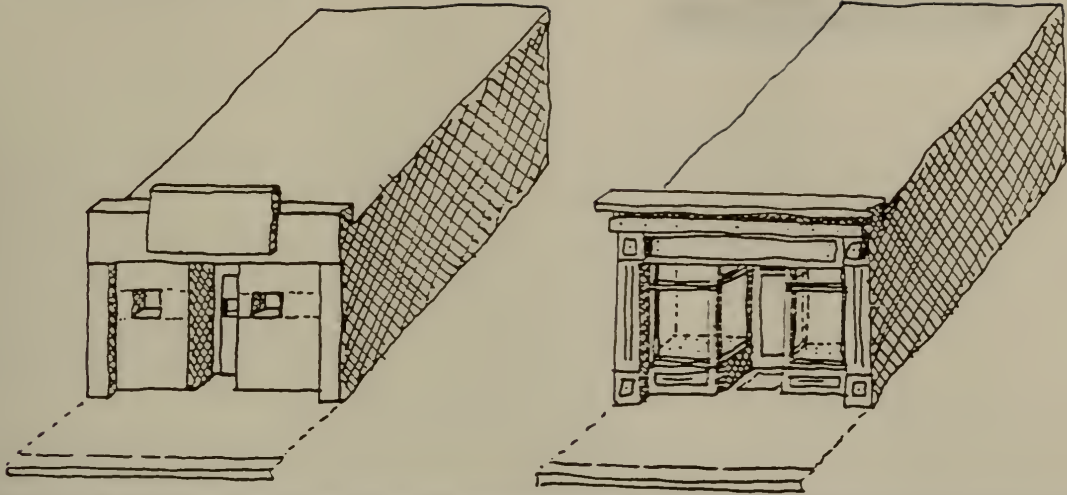
(ii) Use a "frame" to divide the facade into smaller bays and give definition to each store.

For stores or other commercial buildings with frontages in excess of 35ft. the first floor facade should be divided by a clearly expressed frame into smaller bays, no wider than 20ft. each. Clearly distinguish between "frame" and "infill" elements through changes in color and/or materials, or by slightly recessing infill elements, or by a combination of these and other methods.

(iii) The proportions and sizes of individual elements—doors, windows, and bays—should respect the proportions and scale of the Avenue's older commercial architecture.







**Small windows and blank walls create unfriendly street character. Windows provide visual interest along and connections to the Avenue.**

### **Special Treatment of the First Floor**

*Design of first floor facades require special attention to maintain and enhance the Avenue's lively pedestrian environment—small windows and blank walls facing the street create a defensive appearance, while large windows develop strong visual connections between interior and exterior. These concerns are important for all commercial buildings along the Avenue, including offices, industrial and auto-related uses, as well as shops and restaurants.*

#### **4.3. Provide large windows and glass doors along first floor street frontages.**

(i) Locate building entrances to connect directly to the Avenue, wherever possible.

(ii) Provide large windows and doors with transparent glass for as much frontage as possible:

**(a) New and renovated retail and restaurants:** a minimum of 70% of the linear frontage of first floor facade shall comprise doors and windows with transparent glass. Sill heights for any windows included in this calculation should be no higher than 2 ft. above sidewalk level, and tops of windows should be no lower than 8 ft. above sidewalk level.

**(b) New and renovated offices and bars:** a minimum of 50% of the linear frontage of first floor facade shall comprise doors and windows with transparent glass. Sill heights for any windows included in this calculation should be no higher than 3 ft. above sidewalk level, and tops of windows should be no lower than 8 ft. above sidewalk level.

**(c) New industrial and auto-related uses:** a minimum of 50% of the linear frontage of first floor facade shall comprise doors and windows with a combination of transparent glass and other translucent materials (such as glass block). The transparent component shall comprise a minimum of 25% of the total linear frontage. Sill heights for any windows included in this calculation should be no higher than 3 ft. above sidewalk level, and tops of windows should be no lower than 8 ft. above sidewalk level.

**(d) Renovations, or expansions to industrial and auto-related uses** which increase overall area of the business by less than 50% or 1500 s.f.: a preferred target minimum of 50% of the linear frontage of first floor facade (combined new and existing) should comprise doors and windows with a combination of transparent glass and other translucent materials. The transparent component shall comprise a mini-



mum of 25% of the total linear frontage. Sill heights for any windows included in this calculation should be no higher than 3 ft. above sidewalk level, and tops of windows should be no lower than 8 ft. above sidewalk level.

General Note: where an older storefront of high quality has survived which does not meet all the requirements of these guidelines, modifications will not be required. The intent of the guidelines in such a case will be to restore the storefront to its original character.

*Drawing illustrates window requirements for various uses along the Avenue.*





## 4. Buildings and Facades

### Providing for Signs

*Signs were an integral part of the facade design of older commercial buildings. In the design of too many new commercial buildings, sign design is considered too late and signs appear tacked on. Poorly located signs not only detract from the character of the building—they also miss opportunities to more effectively advertise a business.*

#### 4.4. Provide a clearly defined zone for signs on the building facade.

Provision of a sign band on the facade, typical of older commercial buildings, is encouraged. The sign band can be defined by a change in facade color and/or materials, or by an articulation of the facade without changing color or material. In buildings with multiple stores, the sign band should be subdivided so that each section clearly relates to an individual store.

### Materials and Colors

*The special character of a neighborhood often comes from the materials and colors of its buildings. Unlike the North End and the South End, which are built almost entirely of red brick, Dorchester Avenue shows a rich mix of colors and materials. Brightly colored wooden houses and storefronts, in a wide*



*Rich detail including masonry arches on first floor, yellow wood frame second story, and red roof. Renovation preserved rich detail and materials.*  
(Peabody Square)

*variety of colors, give a special character and vitality to many parts of the Avenue. This attractive wooden building stock is complemented by a series of handsome masonry buildings including landmark churches, as well as major commercial and industrial buildings.*

*Whenever possible, new construction should use high quality, durable materials and colors which have enjoyed widespread use on the Avenue. The choice of materials and colors should also take into account those used on nearby buildings. Repairs and renovations to existing buildings should aim to match original materials—at least in appearance. The ways in which materials are used is at least as important as their selection. It may be appropriate, for reasons of economy, to concentrate the use of higher quality materials and more intricate details on the main building facades facing the Avenue.*

#### 4.5. Use materials and colors which are compatible with the Avenue's older commercial architecture.

**Siding:** Wood, aluminum, or vinyl siding may be used. Vinyl and aluminum siding can require less maintenance but will never match the quality of detail—intricate patterns, fine cornices, "fish scales"—of older residential and commercial buildings. Wood invariably looks better; it can incorporate the subtle detail which characterizes the Avenue's finest commercial buildings, and it offers an unlimited choice of colors.

**Masonry:** the Avenue contains many fine masonry buildings, including churches, public buildings, commercial buildings, and some larger residential buildings. Some, such as the Baker Chocolate factory, incorporate fine details and a high level of craftsmanship. Different colors and types of masonry can sometimes be successfully combined in a single building.



However, random mixes of different brick colors tend to have a jarring visual effect, and should be avoided. In general, inappropriate stone or brick veneers add little to the Avenue's traditions and their use is discouraged.

**Other materials:** other materials, including stucco and cast stone, should also be used in a way that is compatible with existing buildings of high quality.

**Colors:** Vivid colors give a very special character to Dorchester Avenue. Take cues from the architecture of the building. Limit the number of colors selected; use several shades of the same color, or similar colors for a rich look. Major building elements, such as columns, piers, and sign bands should be painted in the same color. Use subdued colors for large surfaces, with bright or strong colors reserved for accents—on doors, to highlight interesting details, or in signs and graphics. Highlighting details in different colors can look fussy. All areas to be painted should be properly cleaned and prepared first.

### **Renovating Existing Buildings**

*Many buildings of high architectural quality along the Avenue have been overwhelmed by layers of inappropriate and badly-designed alterations. In such cases the objective for new renovation work should not be to add a new layer, but rather to peel away the many poor layers to reveal the underlying character of the building's architecture. In other cases important features which define the building's character--elaborate cornices, intricate wood trim, window surrounds--have deteriorated due to lack of maintenance. Repairing these elements can restore freshness to the Avenue's buildings.*

### **4.6. Maintain, preserve and enhance existing facades of good underlying quality.**

- (i) Identify and preserve important architectural features which contribute to the quality of the building and the Avenue as a whole. Such features include wood and brick details, relief panels, cornices, lintels, bay windows, and copper and slate roofs. Renovations and new buildings should use materials traditional to the Avenue.
- (ii) Ongoing maintenance is the best way to preserve the Avenue's architecture. Pay special attention to roofs, parapets, cornices, windows, and other vulnerable places. Where repair is impossible due to deterioration the objective should be to preserve to the greatest degree possible the original character of the building.
- (iii) When cleaning masonry, take care not to damage the bricks or mortar joints. Always test clean a small area first. Low pressure water cleaning is the safest method. Chemical cleaning requires an experienced professional, and should use the mildest strength necessary. Never sandblast brick—it destroys the outer layer of the bricks, and leads to further deterioration.

### **Things to Avoid**

**4.7. Avoid the use of false mansard roofs, wood shakes, and other elements which do not reflect the Avenue's real history or traditions.**





**5.0 STOREFRONTS . . .** should be open and welcoming to the shopper and stroller. Materials and details should be in keeping with the Avenue's finest commercial architecture.

*The character of a commercial district is closely tied to the quality of its storefronts. Large storefront windows, creative signage, colorful awnings, and interesting window displays can make a business district more pleasant for shoppers—and more successful for its businesses. Well-designed storefronts can meet security concerns, while still preserving an open and welcoming quality.*

*The City of Boston Public Facilities Department (PFD), which administers funds for storefront rehabilitation and new signage, has prepared a booklet, **Design Guidelines for Commercial Districts**. The booklet is essential for anyone interested in working with PFD on a new storefront and is also an excellent source of information on how to design or restore a good storefront. For further information, see p. 81.*



*Fine storefront...*





### Basic Principles

*In storefront design, it is important to strike a balance between the individual identity of each storefront, and the relationship of stores to other stores in the same building and in neighboring buildings.*

#### 5.1. Emphasize the architectural frame to relate storefronts to each other and the building.

Clearly distinguish the "frame" from "infill" elements through changes in color and/or materials, or by slightly recessing infill elements, or by a combination of these and other methods. In buildings with multiple storefronts it is particularly important that the frame is clearly expressed. It should have a consistent color scheme throughout the building irrespective of the colors of individual storefronts. The frame should not be obscured or covered up with signs or other elements unless space is explicitly included for these—such as in a sign band. Use of the frame in this way can create a more unified appearance for a group of stores and can contribute to the overall attractiveness—and success—of the commercial district.

In larger storefronts, use a frame to create divisions within the storefront. Dividing larger storefronts into smaller sections can help assimilate larger commercial facades into the architectural texture of the Avenue. Divisions which are too large disrupt the rhythm of the Avenue's commercial architecture, while divisions which are too small make good display difficult or impossible. (Refer to 4.2.)

Clearly indicate between different businesses through changes in the storefront design. At the same time, all the storefronts of a single building (including such elements as signs and awnings) need to be carefully designed in relation to one another and to the architecture of the building itself.

#### 5.2 Establish an individual identity for each storefront. Recess doorways; do not recess storefront windows.

(i) Changes in color, materials, or alignment should be used to distinguish the storefront from the frame and establish an individual identity for each store.

(ii) Recess doorways: this ensures that outward-opening doors do not obstruct the sidewalk. In addition, recessed doorways add an attractive three-dimensional quality to the storefront, and when combined with a well-designed storefront can enhance the visibility of window displays. The use of special paving is encouraged within doorway recesses. Doorway designs must also provide access for the handicapped.

(iii) Do not recess storefront windows: storefront windows which are deeply recessed within the frame are less visible from the street—particularly when seen in at an angle. In certain cases it may be desirable to recess the storefront by a small dimension, to distinguish between the frame of the building and the storefront itself, but this dimension should be no more than 6"-12".



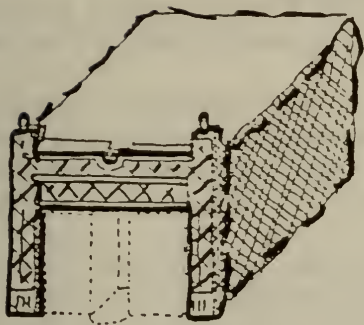
*Recessed doorway increases window display area.*

*(Columbia Road)*



## 5. Storefronts

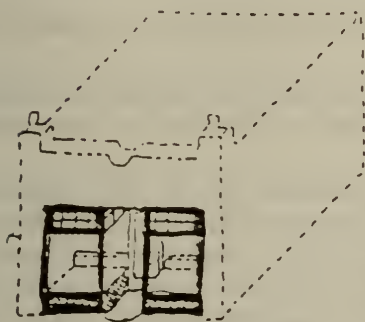
Important parts of individual storefronts .....



..... 1

**FRAME**...is part of building's design—storefront should be set within it.

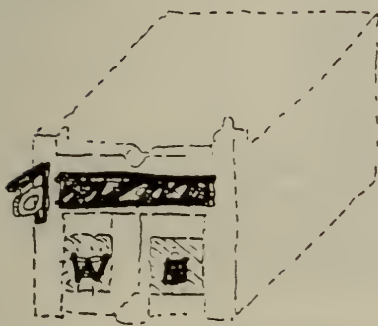
- frame usually includes zone or band for signs.
- use changes in materials, colors, and design to distinguish between frame and storefronts.



..... 2.

**DISPLAY AREA**...may remain unchanged when store changes.

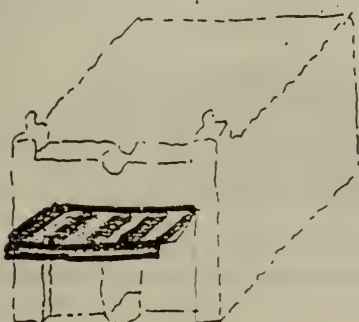
- keep store window flush with frame, or slightly recessed (6-12").
- recess doorway.
- window still no higher than 2 ft.; top of window no lower than 8 ft.



..... 3.

**SIGNAGE**...changes when store changes—or more frequently.

- wall sign—must fit within sign band dimensions
- projecting sign—shows special shape—usually best mounted at end of sign band.
- window sign—letters on glass, board or neon behind glass.



..... 4.

**AWNINGS**...change frequently as material needs to be replaced.

- retractable awnings work best with traditional storefronts.
- fixed awnings can work with newer buildings.





### *Design of Individual Storefront Parts*

**5.3. Display Areas:** Include large transparent glass areas; ensure fenestration reveals not conceals the window display.

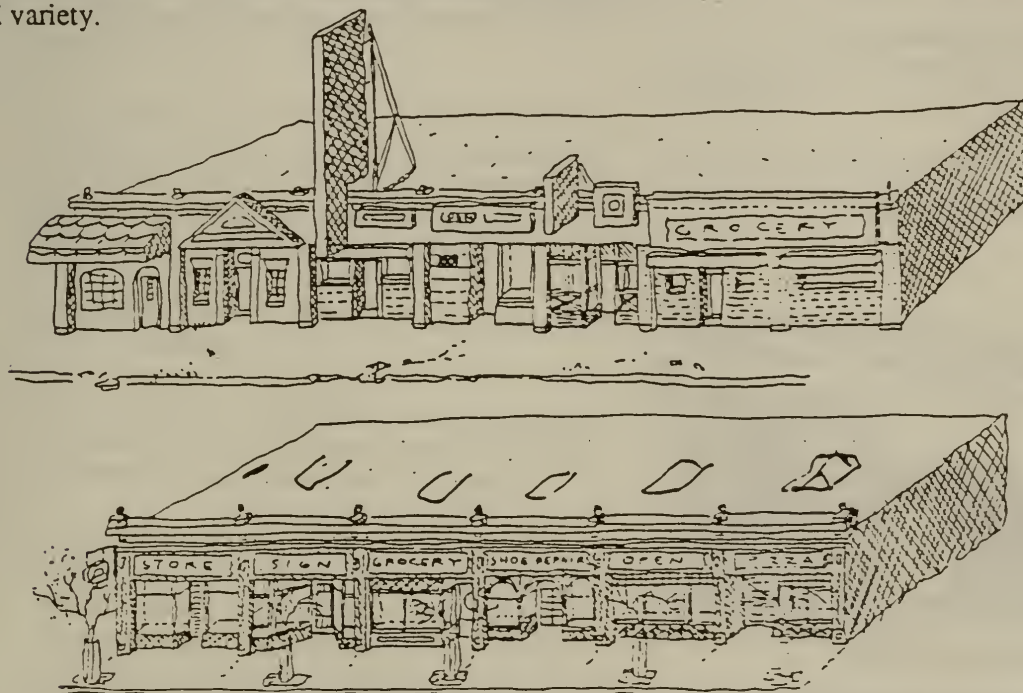
**Glazed Areas:** A minimum of 81% of the linear frontage of a designated storefront shall comprise doors and windows with transparent glass. Sill heights for any windows included in this calculation should be no more than 2 ft. above sidewalk level. Tops of windows included in this calculation should be at least 8 ft. above sidewalk level.

**Fenestration:** Avoid the use of very small glass panes at eye level which obscure the window display, except in the case of historic rehabilitation where small panes originally existed. If small panes are desired, use them in combination with large panes—at the top, at the sides, and/or the bottom—to frame an unrestricted view through the larger pane.

**5.4. Signage:** Integrate signage into the storefront design.

Signage is an integral part of the design of storefronts; it should be compatible in style, size, and location with the storefront and display. (Refer to Section 6.)

In buildings with multiple storefronts a coordinated approach to signage throughout the building is very important. Create a continuous zones for signs across the building's facade. Align tops and bottoms of wall signs with other wall signs in the building whenever possible and locate projecting signs at a consistent height. Even good individual signs when poorly coordinated among other stores in a single building can take away from the appearance the commercial area. Use signs of similar size, proportion, and materials on each store. Vary the color of each store's sign to add variety.



*A coordinated approach to signage among multiple storefronts can be a positive improvement to the individual stores and to the Avenue.*



## Awnings

*Awnings are a traditional way to embellish a storefront or building. They can provide a location for a sign or even become the sign. They also provide shade for a sunny storefront, keeping the interior cooler, providing a shaded place for the passerby to walk, and protecting the display window from exposure to the sun. Awnings can sometimes provide a very effective low cost way of making a significant improvement to a storefront which may in the longer term require more major alterations. Awnings can be retractable or have fixed frames. Retractable awnings are more traditional and are appropriate for most older buildings. Fixed-frame awnings allow material to be stretched tautly over the frame giving a contemporary, tailored appearance.*

### 5.5. Awnings are strongly encouraged.

(i) Color and style of awnings should be coordinated with the storefront and the building facade—and in multiple storefront buildings with adjacent stores. (Awnings don't have to be the same color as adjacent stores but they shouldn't clash with their neighbors either.)

(ii) Include proper blocking to mount the awning frame securely, and a protective hood or pocket to protect the awning in its retracted position. Locate new awnings in these positions in existing storefronts wherever possible.

(iii) Do not cover important architectural details with the awning.

(iv) Carefully maintain the awning fabric. Fabric awning covers need to be replaced every two or three years depending on the material.

(v) Use retractable awnings to achieve a more traditional look on renovations to older storefronts. They can be opened as needed, and are more easily protected at night. Fixed frame awnings give a more contemporary look, and may be more appropriate on newer buildings..

## Security Grates

*Security of the storefront is an important issue. With careful planning grates can be successfully integrated into the storefront design without additional expense, to provide security while still preserving the desirable open and welcoming character of the storefront.*

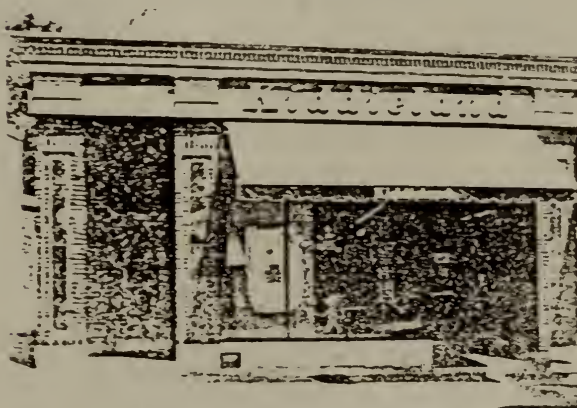
### 5.6. Security Grates should be integrated into the design of the storefront.

Integration of the security shutter with the storefront is essential. The location of the shutter should be considered at the early stages of storefront design.

- (i) Recess the box which contains the shutter and the railing guides in the building facade.
- (ii) Use grilles which are perforated, not solid.
- (iii) Where the shutter box is visible, paint it to fit in with the storefront color scheme.
- (iv) Face of the box can become a sign.

### 5.7. Air Conditioners: provide space for recessed air conditioners where necessary.

Air conditioners should not project from the storefront over the sidewalk or the store entrance.



*Storefront designed as a total composition.  
(Roslindale Square)*





## Materials

### 5.8. Use materials which are compatible with the character of the building and the Avenue.

- (i) Materials should reinforce the open and welcoming character of the storefront. Solid panels below or above the window should be expressed as infill, and set within the framing system of the storefront.
- (ii) Framing members: metal is acceptable; wood is generally better, since it allows thinner framing members and more detail.
- (iii) Glass should be transparent, not reflective. Opaque or colored glass is acceptable in transoms (above 8 ft. height).

## Colors

*Color is an important and special part of the Avenue's character; it is one of the most direct and economical ways in which merchants can express what makes their stores or businesses special. While variety and experimentation with color schemes is to be encouraged, coordination between neighbors and care in selecting colors compatible with the buildings' architecture must also be emphasized.*

### 5.9. Use color to bring an additional dimension to the storefront.

- (i) Take cues from the architecture of the building; integrate the colors selected for the storefronts with the overall color of the building. Bright or strong colors should generally be reserved for accents—on doors, to highlight interesting details, or in signs and graphics. Too many colors, inappropriate colors, or colors that might clash have the effect of neutralizing each other or obscuring the underlying character of the Avenue's buildings.
- (ii) Limit the number of colors selected; use several shades of the same color, or similar colors for a rich look. A storefront painted in

neutral colors is an effective way to highlight merchandise displayed in the window. Highlighting details in different colors can look fussy.

- (iii) In a building with more than one storefront, shared elements should be painted in the same color—for example, if there is a continuous sign band, it should be painted one color for its entire length. Piers and columns that are part of the building's architecture should be painted the same color.

- (iv) Coordinate colors between neighboring stores. Separate store fronts within the same building do not necessarily all have to be the same, but they should complement each other, so that all elements of the building can reinforce one another.

## Lighting

*The exterior lighting scheme is important to the success of storefront design. Lighting highlighting the sign and display area is often more effective than general lighting of the entire store. When a larger building has a number of storefronts use exterior lighting that is coordinated, since different light sources have different colors. Exterior lighting should not look like security lighting but rather subtly highlight the various storefronts. Fluorescent light works poorly in windows. Insure recessed entry is well lit for safety and visibility.*



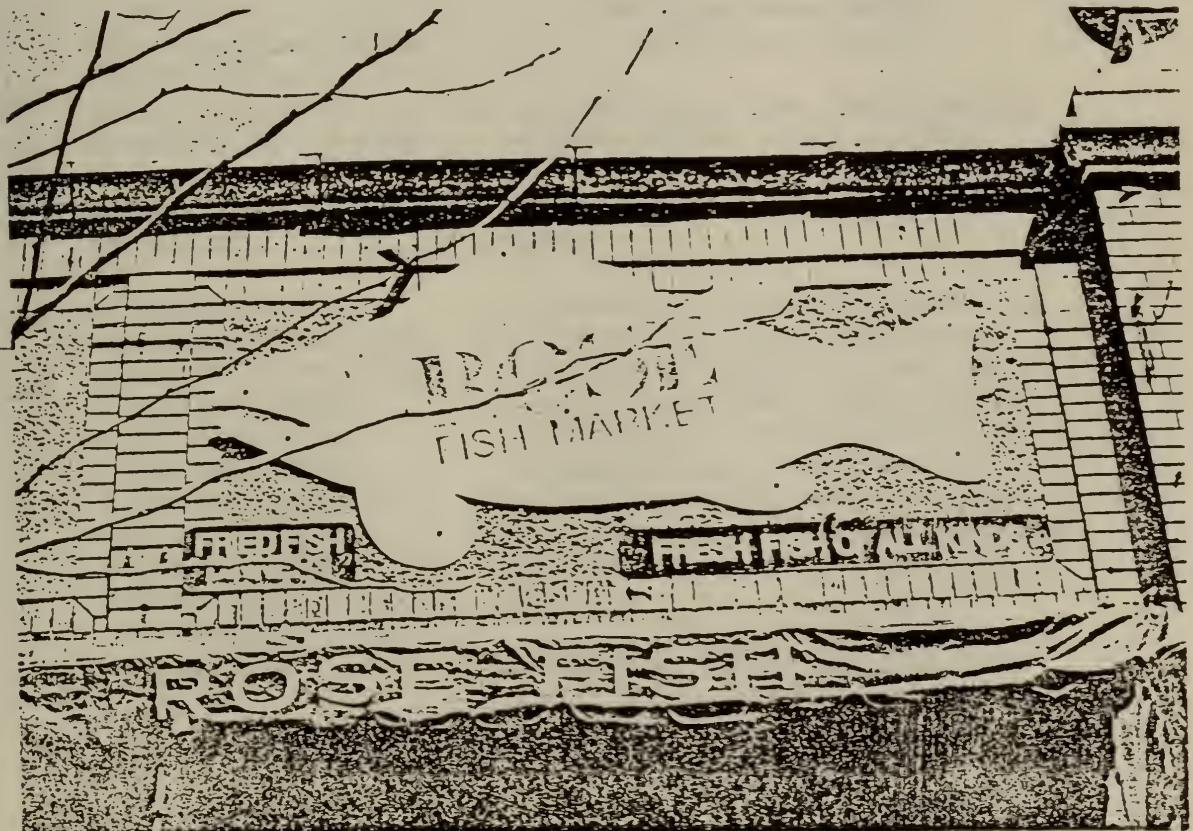


## 6.0 SIGNS ...should enhance the character of individual buildings and the Avenue. Well-designed signs should present a clear and direct message, and should be carefully located to avoid obscuring important architectural features.

*Signs present a message about a business. They should be comparable with the buildings they adorn in terms of type, size, color, and materials. They need to be carefully located, so they do not obscure important architectural features of the building. In addition, signs must be designed in relation to neighboring signs and facades, and to the buildings of the Avenue as a whole, to establish an overall cohesiveness and sense of character for its commercial areas.*

*Signs should be treated as part of the design of the building on which they are placed. The sign should not attempt to convey the entire story a merchant wants to relay—it is the careful combination of sign, building, storefront, and window display, all working together, that has the greatest impact.*

*Signs should also be related to their neighbors. Signs for storefronts in the same building should all be of similar size, material and proportion, and they should all be located in a similar location on the building. While it is not necessary for such signs to use the same color or design, they should look like a family—in this way they reinforce rather than compete with each other.*





There are two basic kinds of sign.

1. **Attached Signs** are directly attached to a building. They include wall signs, projecting signs and window signs.

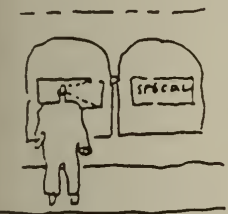


- **Wall Signs** are generally a business's major sign. They are designed to be seen from furthest away--probably from across the street. The size of the wall sign therefore depends on the width of the street as well as

the size of the business. Wall signs on Dorchester Avenue generally use letters from 8" -14" high, and these dimensions are recommended--smaller for smaller stores, larger for larger. Wall signs should not exceed 30" in depth.



- **Projecting Signs** protrude from the storefront over the sidewalk. They are designed to catch your attention as you walk along the street. Projecting signs should be small and eye-catching.



- **Window Signs** present information to pedestrians as they walk in front of the store. This information should complement the store's window display. Window signs painted on storefront glass are a traditional and effective way to present this information. Paper signs taped to glass never look good.



2. **Freestanding Signs** are most often used by businesses with predominantly

drive-in customers, such as gas stations, fast food take-outs and convenience stores. While freestanding signs need to be large enough to be seen from cars, they should not be so large they detract from the overall pedestrian character of the Avenue. Consequently, information contained on the sign needs to be kept very simple with easy-to-read lettering. The overall area of the sign should not exceed 30 s.f.; signs larger than this look like mini-billboards and are to be avoided.

### New Requirements for Signs on Dorchester Avenue:

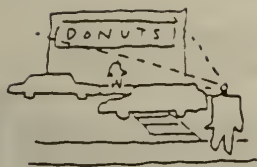
1. All new signs on Dorchester Avenue are required to include the building permit number, clearly but unobtrusively displayed with small letters not exceeding 1 inch in height.

2. Overall sign area should not exceed 2 sq. ft. for each foot of frontage the building occupies on the street (this includes area of the wall sign, permanent window signs, and projecting signs). These guidelines apply to all buildings on Dorchester Avenue irrespective of their distance from the street or linear frontage. Special allowances do not apply to businesses with frontages less than 25 ft.

3. Temporary signs are required to clearly display the date of posting.







6.1. The wall sign is usually the major sign. It is viewed from furthest away—often from across the street—and should be clearly legible from this distance. Wall signs should be carefully sized to fit in with the building's facade design and avoid obscuring important architectural features.

Viewing Distance: Long/Medium Range—from across the street

#### TYPES of SIGN

- Board/backing with letters painted on or attached to backing sign.
- Letters applied directly to building—can be especially effective on buildings containing a single storefront.

#### SIZE and PLACEMENT

Do not exceed 30" deep. Locate within the sign band where one exists. Do not cover up important architectural details including cornices, piers, and other important elements. Top of sign must not exceed 25 ft. above grade, the underside of the sills of upper level windows, the lowest portion of the roof (or the top of the parapet in the case of single story buildings with parapets)—whichever is lowest. Bottom of sign should be at least 8 ft. above grade

#### LETTERING

- Letters 8"-14" high on board signs.
- In the case of letters applied directly to the building, larger letters 8"-20" high may be appropriate.

#### MESSAGE

- Sign is seen from furthest away—message needs to be simple. Include name of store, type of business.

#### MATERIALS

- Wood, metal, or cast plastic letters, painted or gilded.
- Wood or metal boards and/or backing.
- Wood preferred for board signs on older wood buildings.

#### LIGHTING

- Avoid back-lit box signs on older buildings. Incandescent spotlights, fluorescent strips, or neon are preferred.

#### COLORS

- Use light letters on dark background for best effect.
- Use limited palette of colors (generally not more than three colors).

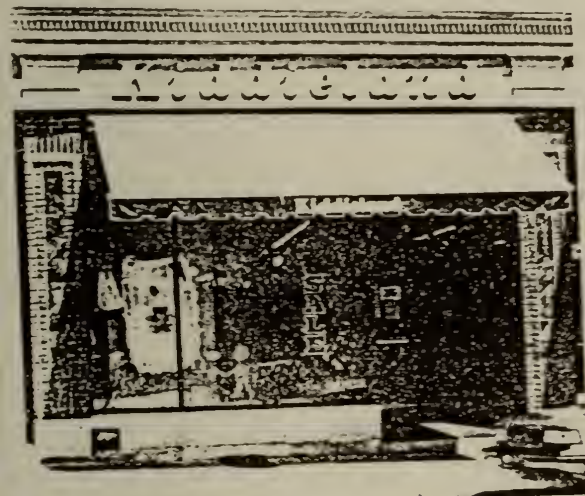
#### SPECIAL CONCERNS

- Do not obscure important architectural features, such as cornices, brackets, or the piers of the building frame.
- Avoid vacuum-formed plastic signs or letters.

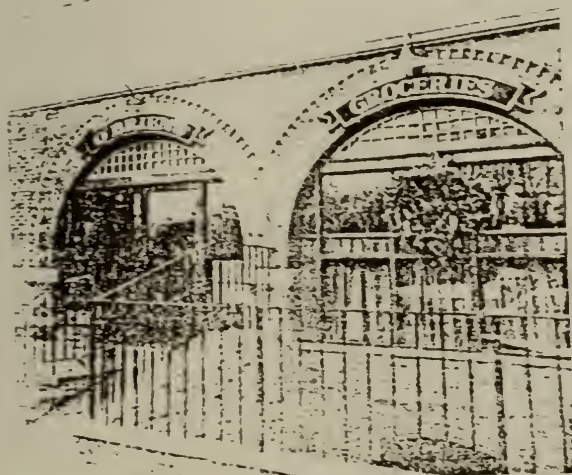




Classic sign, light letters painted on a dark sign board, centered within the sign band. (Rosindale Center)



Letters applied directly to the building, are designed and painted to be coordinated with the architectural detail of the building. (Rosindale Center)



Signage works with unusual architectural detail of the building. (Dorchester Avenue)





**6.2. Projecting signs project over the sidewalk to catch your eye as you walk along the sidewalk. Unusual shapes or 3-dimensional objects make eye-catching and effective projecting signs, and add a special character to the building.**

Viewing Distance: Medium/Short Range—from on the sidewalk

- should not be used on frontages less than 18 ft. wide

#### *TYPES of SIGN*

Signs should tell the story visually, using three dimensions where possible. A projecting sign can be an object or symbol, using a minimum of words.

#### *SIZE and PLACEMENT*

- Not the major sign—10 s.f. maximum.
- Relate size to sign band and architectural character of building. Usually best location at one end of storefront—so it does not detract from the major sign. Top of sign must not exceed 25 ft. above grade, the underside of the sills of upper level windows, the lowest portion of the roof (or the top of the parapet in the case of single story buildings with parapets)—whichever is lowest. Sign should not overhang the sidewalk by more than 6 ft. Bottom of sign should be a minimum of 10 ft. above grade.

#### *LETTERING*

Letters 4 " to 10" high.

#### *MESSAGE*

Augment message on primary sign—do not duplicate information. Use the shape to tell a story. Avoid using generic signs with advertisers' names; this gets their message across, not yours.

#### *MATERIALS*

Wood, metal, or plastic can work well. Vacuum-formed plastic faces in metal frames are inappropriate: they look completely out of place on older buildings.

#### *LIGHTING*

Incandescent, halogen, or fluorescent lights preferred; ensure that exterior use fixtures are specified. Internally-lit box signs are bulky and inappropriate.

#### *COLORS*

Bright colors work well and catch the eye. Remember to relate colors to colors of the building itself

#### *SPECIAL CONCERNS*

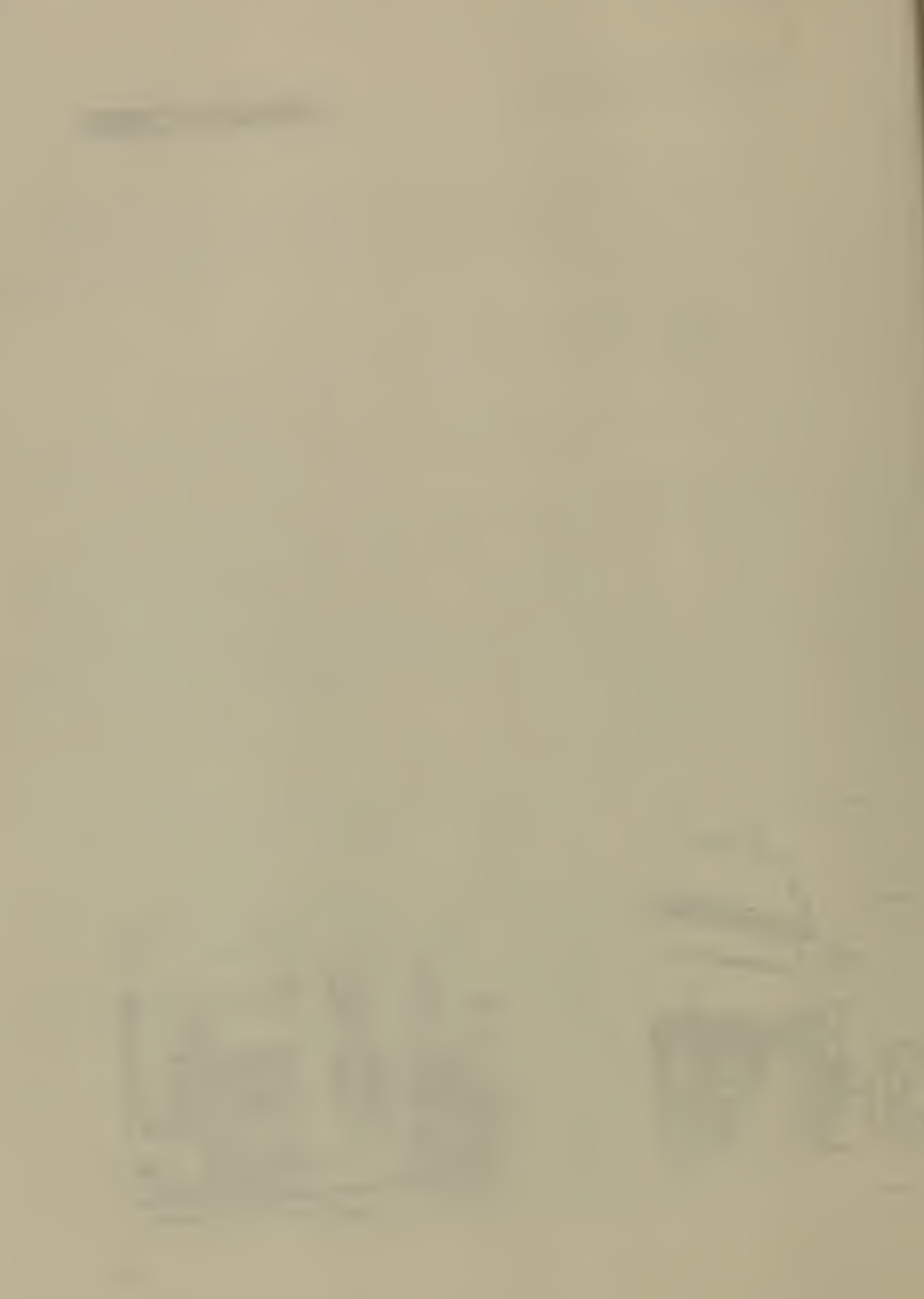
All projecting signs on one building should look like a family—size, form, location, and method of hanging should all be similar. The bracket is and should be designed as part of the sign. Projecting signs need to be designed to withstand wind loads.

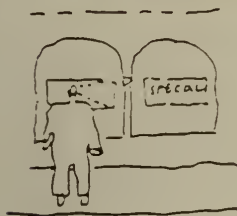






*Traditional projecting signs on Dorchester avenue.*





6.3. Window signs are seen from closest up—right in front of the store. Use them for more detailed information and to complement the window display.

Viewing Distance: Short Range—from in front of the store

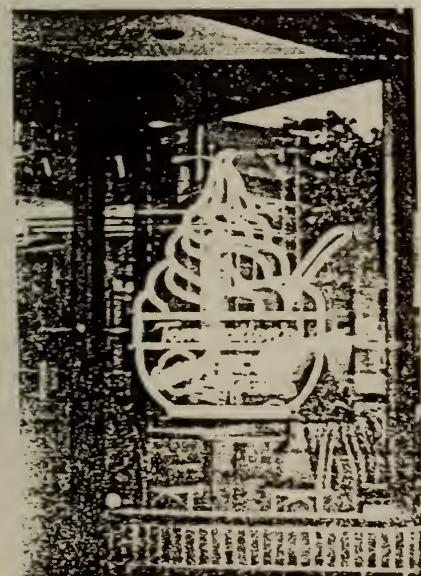
<i>TYPES of SIGN</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lettering applied directly to the glass.</li><li>• Paper, cardboard signs on the inside of the glass.</li><li>• Neon signs—can add special interest to the window</li></ul>
<i>SIZE</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Combined area of the permanent signs may not exceed 30% of the window area at first floor.</li></ul>
<i>LETTERING</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Window lettering height: 1/2" minimum, 8" maximum.</li></ul>
<i>LOCATION</i>	<p>Should be located at or near eye level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• on glass, located so letters are easily read from sidewalk; or</li><li>• on paper or cardboard, mounted on board, held back from glass.</li></ul>
<i>MESSAGE</i>	<p>Name of store, proprietor's name, hours of operation, products sold, sales, specials, and new merchandise are all appropriate information for window signs. Be sure not to cover up so much of window that view of the store is blocked.</p>
<i>LIGHTING</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lettering on glass cannot be easily lit.</li><li>• Hanging signs, 1-2 ft. behind glass, can be lit by display area spot-lights.</li><li>• Neon makes excellent window signs—lively and colorful.</li></ul>
<i>COLORS</i>	<p>Light colors—white or gold leaf—usually best for lettering on storefront window glass.</p>
<i>SPECIAL CONCERNS</i>	<p>Paper signs taped on glass never look good. Where possible fix paper signs to a rigid backer board and hang them at least 6" back from the glass.</p>







Window signs are a small part of the overall storefront composition.



Neon is an attractive material for window signs.





6.4. These signs are most often used by businesses with predominantly drive-in business—gas stations, fast food take-outs, and convenience stores. Information should be kept very simple to ensure legibility. Over-sized signs can detract from the overall pedestrian character of the Avenue.

Viewing Distance: Long Range—from a car

#### TYPES of SIGN

**SIZE** Overall area should not exceed 30 s.f.—larger than this appears like a billboard.

#### LETTERING

**LOCATION** Locate close to the edge of the sidewalk. Top of sign must not be higher than 25 ft. above grade.

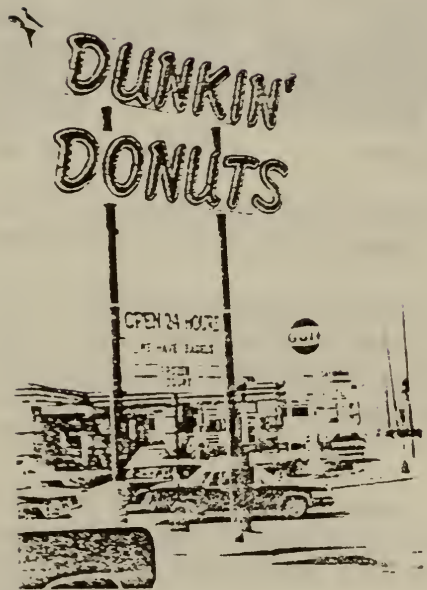
**MESSAGE** Very simple--needs to be seen and understood from cars.

**LIGHTING** Internally or externally illuminated. Neon, Channel Letters.

#### SPECIAL CONCERNS

Vacuum formed signs can look cheap.  
Landscaping around base of sign helps.  
If have more than one sign/pole, signs should look related.  
Freestanding signs are only appropriate for buildings that are recessed from the sidewalk and/or those which don't fill entire frontage. Can be three dimensional objects, have changeable message areas, two sided, pole mounted often may provide time, temperature, entry to parking or drive through.





Typical freestanding signs.





## **7.0 NEW RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS... should respect the well-defined patterns of height, siting, and architectural character of the Avenue's residential areas.**

*There are many stretches of Dorchester Avenue that are predominately residential in character. In general the same guidelines apply to residential buildings as to commercial buildings, including siting, parking, landscaping, height, materials, and architectural details. In addition, there are a number of other concerns which are specific to the design of residential buildings: providing sunlight, views, and open space to each residential unit, while preserving its privacy; designing parking, paths, and entrances to discourage crime; and giving residents the chance to alter and personalize their own homes. There are also commonly-used architectural features such as porches and stoops which provide private outdoor spaces for residents, and contribute greatly to the visual quality of the Avenue.*

*The City of Boston Public Facilities Department (PFD) has prepared a booklet, Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Housing, as part of its Project 747, which aims to create attractive and affordable new housing on vacant lots throughout the city. The booklet is an excellent source of information on how to approach the design of new residential buildings or renovations. For further information, see p. 81.*



*Traditional triple deckers. (Dorchester Avenue)*



*New residential building. (Dorchester Avenue)*

**7.1. New residential buildings should not exceed three stories in height, except under exceptional circumstances.**

**7.2. Locate parking preferably behind or to side, not in front.**

**7.3. Include landscaped front yard.**

Under special circumstances, for instance where a well defined and attractive residential pattern exists without front yards, buildings may match the existing pattern.

**7.4. Include a fence and landscaping between the lot and the street.**

**7.5. Include architectural features such as porches, stoops, and bay windows which give the residential architecture of Dorchester Avenue its special character.**

**7.6. Use materials which are compatible with the architectural character of the Avenue's existing buildings.**









## **8.0 LARGE PROJECTS...require special consideration to ensure that they respect neighborhood concerns and the character of the Avenue.**

As larger projects are unusual on Dorchester Avenue they need special care to ensure they fit in well with the character of the Avenue and surrounding neighborhoods. These projects can present special opportunities to make real improvements to the Avenue. But there are also possible negative impacts due to the size or the impacts of traffic generated by new development.

The design of large projects must address all of the points identified throughout these guidelines, with special attention paid to such issues as:

- **site planning:** where is parking located? how do pedestrians, including the handicapped, move from the project to the Avenue? What is the landscaping?
- **use:** is this an appropriate mix of uses for the Avenue? Are there provisions for lively first-floor uses along the Avenue?
- **building design:** are the massing, height, scale, and architectural character of the project compatible with the character of the Avenue?



## **Applying the Guidelines: The Process**



## How to Use the Guidelines

### The Process of Design Review

- Steps . . . . .
- BRA TO ADD









## Applying the Guidelines:

Lower Mills:

Gallivan  
Boulevard:

### Commercial Buildings

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**1.0 SITE PLANNING...***should locate buildings directly on the Avenue, with parking located behind or to the side.*

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**2.0 PARKING LOTS, OUTDOOR WORK and STORAGE AREAS...***should be screened with landscaping and fencing from the Avenue and abutting residential uses.*

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**3.0 LANDSCAPING and SCREENING ...***should be used to make the Avenue's commercial districts more attractive, and to provide visual screening between commercial and residential uses.*

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**4.0 COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS and FACADES...***new and renovated buildings should be compatible with the height and architectural character of the Avenue's existing commercial buildings and should encourage active street life.*

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**5.0 STOREFRONTS...***should be open and welcoming to the shopper and stroller. Materials and details in keeping with the Avenue's finest commercial architecture.*

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**6.0 SIGNS...***should enhance the character of individual buildings and the Avenue. Signs should present a clear and direct message, and should be carefully located to avoid obscuring important architectural features.*

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### Residential Buildings

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**7.0 RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS. . .***new and renovated buildings should reflect the well-defined patterns of height, siting, and architectural character in the Avenue's residential areas.*

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### Larger Development Projects

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**8.0 LARGER PROJECTS . . .***will be subject to design review to ensure they respect neighborhood concerns and the character of the Avenue.*

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*Peabody  
Square:*

*Peabody  
Square to  
Fields Corner:*

*Fields Corner:*

*Glover's  
Corner:*

*Columbia  
Road:*

*Andrew  
Square:*



### • Lower Mills:

A neighborhood commercial center marked by several renovated landmark mills and churches. A Heritage State Park already focuses on the area's historical importance as an early manufacturing center. Successful streetscape improvements and building renovations have accompanied the Park.

Additional improvements can capture Lower Mills' full potential as a neighborhood center, including signage and storefronts which are more compatible with the area's handsome buildings and which present a more harmonious face to the Avenue. Landscaping and other improvements would serve to reduce the harshness of the shopping center parking lot.



### • Gallivan Boulevard:

An attractive, well landscaped, section of the Avenue in which residential and institutional uses and the large Dorchester Park complement each other.

Continued improvements to the Park, careful monitoring to insure that new construction reinforces the residential character of the area, and confinement of auto-related uses at Gallivan Boulevard will enhance the area's attractive character.



### • Peabody Square:

A handsome neighborhood commercial center which derives much character from several attractive Victorian commercial blocks and the noteworthy All Saints Church.

The Square itself would benefit from more appropriate signage, storefronts, and landscaping for some of the smaller commercial buildings and parking lots which currently detract from its handsome character. Well designed new buildings replacing parking areas and vacant lots, and improved signage and new storefronts could extend the Square's character to the area's immediately north and south.



### • Peabody Square to Fields Corner:

A good example of a well-cared-for residential street which also accommodates 50 % of the commercial uses serving the surrounding neighborhood. This section is also marked by landmark churches and a school.

The fragile balance between residential and commercial uses will be helped by increased controls protecting residential uses and by more appropriate signage and storefronts, particularly on newer commercial buildings. More attractive faces to the Avenue for several auto-related businesses are particularly critical.





## Chronology of Community Involvement

\_\_\_\_\_, 1986—elected officials and community leaders marching in the annual Dorchester Avenue Day parade resolve to take steps to restore the Avenue.

\_\_\_\_\_, 1986(?)—formation of Dorchester Avenue Revitalization Team (DART).

\_\_\_\_\_, 1986—Mayor Flynn announces the the City's Public Facilities Department will plant trees along the Avenue.

June, 1987—DART starts meeting with Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) and its urban design consultant, David Dixon & Associates (DD&A).

Oct. \_\_, 1987—Mayor Flynn announces an Interim Planning Overlay District (IPOD) and a commitment to new zoning for the Avenue.

Oct.-June, 1988—DART organizes a series of community meetings with the BRA and DD&A to produce a joint vision for restoring the Avenue.

May, 1988—BRA releases the *Dorchester Avenue Urban Design Study* which presents a vision developed jointly with the community.

\_\_\_\_\_, 1989—Mayor Flynn announces formation of a Dorchester Avenue Planning and Zoning Advisory Committee (PZAC) .

June, 1989—BRA begins meeting with the PZAC to prepare new zoning.

\_\_\_\_\_, 1989—BRA issues the draft *Citizen's Handbook*.

BRA TO SUPPLY MISSING INFO





## • Fields Corner:

Significant public and private investment in restoration of landmark commercial buildings and dramatic renewal of the areas' streets and sidewalks point the way toward the revival of Dorchester Avenue's largest commercial center.

The Fields Corner Mainstreet organization can provide leadership for the many kinds of improvements which are still necessary: signage and storefront improvements, particularly on many of the smaller buildings and shops, to bring out the handsome traditional character of so many of the area's buildings and give Fields Corner a visual harmony which it has not enjoyed for years; screening for parking lots which interrupt the Avenue's Main Street rhythm of activities—particularly the large, bleak, shopping center parking lot; an improved entrance to the MBTA Station; and restoration of the Town Field as an attractive neighborhood park and recreation center.



## • Glover's Corner:

Unattractive strip development has displaced most of the area's houses and smaller businesses.

The key to revival of this portion of the Avenue as an appropriate "front door" to the surrounding residential and industrial areas lies in building on the area's role as an important neighborhood jobs center. New signs and facade improvements, landscaping and other screening for parking lots directly on the Avenue, more street trees, and more retail businesses to serve neighborhood residents are all essential to establishing a desirable future.



## • Columbia Road:

A good mixed-use residential and commercial Main Street, marked by fine residential and commercial building stock and the landmark St. Margarets Church.

Maintaining a comfortable balance between residential and commercial uses will require attention to the design of appropriate store fronts, signage improvements, screening for parking lots directly on the Avenue, and careful planning for appropriate new development on vacant lots.



## • Andrew Square:

The meeting point of South Boston and Dorchester, the Square is dominated by parking lots and billboards—contributing to an anonymous character.

New public space, street trees, and a new MBTA Station point the way to longer-term improvements. Handsome buildings replacing parking along the street, improved and new signs and storefronts, and added neighborhood retail uses will transform the area into a public meeting place which will better serve residents of Dorchester Avenue and South Boston.





## Useful Publications

***A Citizen's Guide to Zoning***  
Boston Redevelopment Authority

***A Citizen's Guide to Neighborhood Business Districts***  
Boston Redevelopment Authority

***Boston Sign Code***  
Boston Redevelopment Authority

***Design Guidelines for Commercial Districts***  
City of Boston, Public Facilities Department

***Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Housing***  
City of Boston, Public Facilities Department

***A Pattern Book of Houses***  
City of Boston, Public Facilities Department

## Who to Call

**Boston Redevelopment Authority: 722-4300**

**Public Facilities Department: 720-4300**

**Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services: 725-3485**

**Boston Transportation Department: 725-4675**

**Mayor's Office of Capital Planning and Operations: 725-3493**

**Inspectional Services Department:**

**Economic Development and Industrial Corporation: 725-3342**

**DART?**

















